

ROBERT CAMPBELL STEWART

My Boyhood in Pa'ailo

As told to Liane Ulumealani Stewart. [This is the true story of my father's childhood, as far as he can remember, of his formative years from ages three through seven—from 1913 through 1920. The chronology is blurred because so much time has elapsed between his living the Hawaiian communal life on the Big Island of Hawai'i and today, 1990. He resides today in A'iea, O'ahu in a home that he built.

In keeping with my father's wishes, no names are used in the story, except for that of my father, Robert Campbell Stewart (figs. 1 and 2). He grew up with the name Keo, which means Joe. His grandfather, a kahuna, was called Reverend Waiohinu, and his grandmother was Keliua, and they were in charge of everyone in this town, Pa'ailo.]

IN MY YOUNGER DAYS, I lived in a sort of commune in Pa'ailo, Hawai'i with my aunts and uncles and their families.

Grandfather was the head of the commune, and he was a *Kahuna Pule* (Traveling Priest) who traveled around and held worship services in some of the out-of-the-way places. He traveled by hack or surrey. Sometimes I had the good fortune to travel with him if he was going to make it back home on the same Sunday. He conducted baptisms as well as sermons. Baptisms were held in ponds of the streams that abound in that area. The music for his services was furnished by himself with a little concertina that he always carried with him.

My grandmother raised me until her death when I was ten

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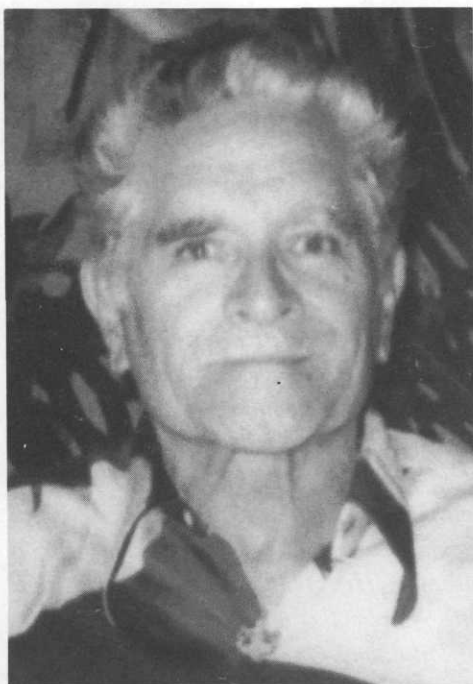


FIG. 1. Robert Campbell Stewart. (Stewart family photo.)

FIG. 2. (*below*) Robert Campbell Stewart with (*left to right*) unidentified male, daughter Liane Ulumealani Stewart, and Morrnah Nulamaku Simeona, at a gathering of the Foundation of I, Inc., "Self Identity through Ho'oponopono." (Stewart family photo.)



years old. Every evening after supper my grandmother would read passages from the Bible in Hawaiian. The Bible was written in Hawaiian, and sometimes I got to read aloud from it, and this is when I was only three years old. Everything pertaining to the family was kept on pages in the Bible. I spoke Hawaiian at all times at home, but I spoke English at play.

We lived simply. The men and women planted sweet potatoes and breadfruit in abundance. Breadfruit was gathered by the men and women and eaten as a staple. *Poi* (taro), however, we got from Waipi'o Valley. It was—and still is—the main staple food. Our diet also included sugar cane, and we enjoyed the canned sardines in tomato sauce also.

On weekends, the adult males of the family would get on horseback either Friday evening or early Saturday morning and return late Sunday afternoon at about twilight. They'd return with *poi* bags full of *opihi* (limpets) and some fish, most often with great big *puhi uha* (white eels) which were fixed in all kinds of ways. What was not eaten immediately was cut into strips and hung out to dry.

Sometimes the men went hunting and brought back wild pigs, which were cut up and put in a *kelemania*, or a crockery container, and salted. The pigs were cut up and dried, too, if they were not cooked at once. An underground oven was used to cook the pig. Pork was the main dish during wedding celebrations.

As I remember, the men never killed or fished for more than we could eat in a certain period of time simply because there was no refrigeration. Everything, though, was kept in a safe, boxlike affair with shelves and surrounded by wire screening. There was a door that allowed for putting in such foodstuffs as *'opae pake* (dried shrimp).

There were times that mules, which pulled the train cars, would get very badly hurt because their cars became runaway cars. Then the camp policemen would come around and let everyone know when a mule was to be killed. This was done—the announcing—so that we villagers would be there to receive the free mule meat. If the mule to be killed was a sick mule, it would be taken to a wooden chute, after it was killed, and pushed down through it to the ocean. The mule meat we did get, though, was dried and eaten as jerk meat.

Our community lived on a homestead, but a portion in the back was leased to some Chinese who manufactured *tofu*, a high protein soy bean preparation, there. So we had variety in food.

GAMES

Animals brought us children great pleasure. When my grandfather sold a couple of acres of the land on the side of the homestead to a Japanese man, he immediately put up a store and built a corral that he stocked with mules. We'd sit and watch him work the mules.

At about this time I got my first horse, a tame animal that I could crawl under and ride without a saddle. I'd guide it with a *punuke* or rope that I looped over its nose in place of a bridle. I named my horse Makanui, which means Big Eyes.

We considered it fun to go by horseback to gather berries and *liliko'i* (purple passion fruit), which were plentiful, and when the bags were loaded, we'd bring them home. They kept very well and could be stored for quite a while. We also played many other games, such as steal eggs, tag, and even foot racing.

We played cowboys and Indians by simply sticking a broom handle between our legs and riding it around. Another game we played as children was to get as many sardine cans as we could, and, tying them end to end, we'd pretend that it was a train. We loaded each can with whatever we could find.

SICKNESSES AND HEALTH METHODS

Every Saturday, we, my cousins and I, would line up for our weekly castor oil intake, which was given to us by my grandfather. It was given to us right after breakfast. When we received a tablespoon of castor oil, we also got a pinch of sugar. *Liliko'i*, like the guava, can cause constipation when too much of it is eaten because the fruit itself has hundreds of seeds, and my grandfather seemed to know we ate a lot of it.

For other problems my grandmother fashioned many herb medicines. I remember during the great flu epidemic in 1920 that my mother was the only one on her feet from a total of about 15

children and adults, and the only medicine that helped to keep her and us well was a concoction of brews and *pūlo'ulo'u* (steam bath). After we took this brew and *pūlo'ulo'u*, we were covered with a blanket, and by turns each of us had to lean over a tub of steaming eucalyptus leaves. The steam caused us to sweat out all the impurities. This epidemic did not hit all of us at once, but maybe one or two a day would get sick, or even three or four. We'd stay in bed until we had our turn at the tub for the steam treatment. Not one of our community died; in fact, everyone was restored to good health.

There was another important way of curing certain illnesses or pain and that was by *la'au kāhea*, or faith or prayer healing. Anybody who asked for help my grandparents would help in this way. Some of the more common herbs used were *la'au kukui*, *la'au popolo*, and *la'au lau kahi*, among many others.

When I was five years old it was time for the boys to be circumcised. The reason this was done at age five was that all of us were born at home without benefit of midwives or doctors, so circumcision wasn't done then but later.

There were four of us who had to be circumcised. My grandfather did the circumcisions—he even did them for the neighbors—besides all of the other things. He was quite proficient. What happened was that we were made to sit in half drums of ice cold water for about 20 or more minutes. I, because I was the youngest, was circumcised first. It never struck me that circumcision was a big thing until I saw the knife; it was then I screamed. This started bedlam when added to by the noise from those who were to follow. After the foreskin was removed, I went back into the tub of cold water. Strangely enough, there was very little bleeding.

RECREATION

Some of the days we looked forward to were the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, Armistice Day, and some other holidays. On these days, we boarded the train at Pa'auilo, which also was the end of the line from Hilo. Here the locomotive got on a great big round table, and it was pushed around so that it faced the direction of Hilo.

The trip to Hilo was, I think, one of the most scenic trips anywhere. We traveled over high trestles that spanned great gorges, traveled along great cliffs overlooking the sea, and went through one short and one fairly long tunnel. On these days when we went to Hilo, we took our lunch with us. We took in sporting events, horseracing, and the band concert. It was a full day, and at the end, when we got back on the train for the ride home, we were exhausted.

We had a movie theater which showed pictures only about twice a week, sometimes oftener at nights, and we would sit on the floor to watch black and white silent movies.

I also made several trips to Honolulu with my grandmother after the death of my grandfather, who died when I was about five-and-a-half years old. On these trips we sailed to Honolulu on the old steamship *Mauna Kea*, which was later replaced by the *Haleakala*. We had a home at Fort and Kuakini Streets. I still remember the old address: 1764 Fort and Kuakini Streets.

LEGENDS

Legends and superstitions were plentiful. Many of them pertain to Pele as a woman whom certain people claimed a cousin of theirs had met on the highway. She warned them of some calamity that was to happen, or she advised them on how they should conduct themselves in the days following.

I recall much was said about a dog on the highway, which could be colored white, red, or brown, depending on what impact the story-teller wanted to make on his listeners. The story goes that if a villager was traveling to another village and heard a chain being dragged in front of him, it meant that he was not to make the trip that day. If he continued, he would see a little dog in his path. As he approached closer, the dog would grow to huge proportions and block his path. He was to return home and get some offering, usually the 'awa root or some other form of offering.

Many Hawaiians were deathly afraid of the *akua lele* (the spirit taken out of a person's body and sent to harm another person or thing). The *akua lele* was a ball of fire which usually could be seen to burst somewhere near the village. Some people claimed it to be

a gaseous ball that lit up, but the people of our area would read into it either a good or bad omen.

Whenever any stranger entered the village where we lived, he was immediately asked to "*komo mai e ai*," or "come in and have something to eat." The proper thing to do was to accept, but if he could not because he was hurrying through, the proper thing to say was "*kahi wa aku*," "some other time." The reason for the invitation was to get the latest news of the people and places the stranger had just come from. We were his very interested listeners. By the same token he would be asked to give a message to someone in the next village. To just say "*mahalo*" or "thank you" and continue on was almost tantamount to an insult, followed by "*he pi wahi ka aka*," a saying which means "that guy is a mean fellow (or a stingy man) who won't give any news and won't deliver any."

ECONOMY

As a child I remember we had a great deal of acreage planted to sugar cane. It worked this way. The plantations plowed, planted, and fertilized and charged this labor to the crops. After the sugar cane was harvested and the expenses were taken out, then we received money for the use of our land. We were expected to try to keep the fields free from weeds as well as we could, because any other help from the plantation was charged to the crop and the expenses would increase and our income would decrease.

At the time of harvest my mother or some other member of the family would stay close to the scales to check to make sure the plantation was not getting too much of an advantage. The cane was cut by hand and tied into bundles, and the bundles were weighed on the scales.

I remember as a little boy when oxen teams pulled the cane cars into the fields on portable tracks which were laid in the fields so that the harvested cane could be brought out. These teams were being phased out to be replaced by great big Missouri mules which could take cane cars into the fields at a much faster rate than the oxen that had been used.

The manager of the plantation at that time got around on

horseback, and, when he had V.I.P.'s visiting, they rode in an open-air bus, which was like the vehicles that ran on railroad tracks and were propelled by gasoline engines.

There were times when I was very young, I'd run into the house and make myself a bowl of *pokiwai*. This was water that was sweetened with crackers that were broken up and put into the bowl. We all loved *pokiwai* on a hot day. The water was taken straight from the barrel, which was set up near the house to catch the rain water that ran off the roof.

SCHOOLING

By the time I was six years old, all of my cousins had entered school, and I was learning the alphabet and nursery rhymes from them. By the summer of my seventh birthday, it was decided by my grandmother that she and I should move to Honolulu so that I could enter what was considered then to be one of the best schools. So, in the summer of my seventh birthday, I was registered at the old Central Grammar School. The main building of this school, I understand, was the home of Queen Emma.

These then were the years of my youth. I feel that I had a very fulfilling childhood. Hawaiians always talked in riddles, and now I will leave you with a Hawaiian riddle, taught to me by my grandmother, which goes like this:

Kuni ha ia ai loko ka unahi
Heha kela
He nōi noho 'i
 This fish of mine,
 The scales are on the inside.
 What is it?

A chili pepper, of course.